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ABSTRACT

Preschool children (N=23) and fifth-grade children (N=23) and their mothers judged the acceptability of corporal punishment as a function of the type of transgression (acting danerously, violating a social rule, or violating a moral precept) and discipline agent. Children of both ages and their mothers discriminated among different types of transgressions as a function of rule contingency, rule generalizability, and seriousness of the transgression. Compared to others, social convention transgressions were judged to be more rule contingent, less generalizable across settings, and less serious than dangerous or moral violations; however, children overall judged transgressions to be more generalizable than did their mothers. Preschool children showed broad acceptability for severe corporal punishment, that was consequent to any type of transgression, and administered by any agent, whereas fifth graders were generally discriminating about limits of punishability, and their judgments appeared to be transitional between the broad acceptance shown by younger children and more focused acceptability shown by mothers. Mothers did not condone punishment by other agents and tended to focus on dangerous and moral violations as most punishable. Findings suggest a developmental path from a single criterion for young children to consideration of multiple criteria for older children and adults. Judgments were also interpreted as reflecting social roles such as parents' responsibility to constrain children and children's expectations for constraint. Implications for children's ability to identify and report abuse are discussed. (RH)

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CHILDREN'S AND MOTHER'S JUDGMENTS ABOUT THE ACCEPTABLE USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

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Abstract

Preschool and fifth-grade children and their mothers judged the acceptability of corporal punishment as a function of the type of transgression (acting dangerously, violating a social rule, or violating a moral precept) and discipline agent. Children of both ages and their mothers discriminated among different types of transgressions as a function of rule contingency, rule generalizability, and seriousness of the transgression. Social convention transgressions were judged to be more rule contingent, less generalizable (across settings), and less serious than dangerous or moral violations, but overall children judged transgressions to be more generalizable than did their mothers. Preschool children showed broad acceptability for corporal punishment that was severe, that was consequent to any type of transgression, and administered by any agent, whereas fifth graders were generally discriminating about limits of punishability, and their judgments appeared to be transitional between the broad acceptance shown by younger children and more focused acceptability shown by mothers. Mothers did not condone punishment by other agents and tended to focus on dangerous and moral violations as most punishable. Findings suggest a developmental path from a single criterion for young children to consideration of multiple criteria for older children and adults. Judgments were also interpreted as reflecting social roles such as parents' responsibility to constrain children and children's expectations for constraint. Implications for children's ability to identify and report abuse are discussed.

Children's and Mother's Judgments about the Acceptable use of Corporal Punishment

The corporal punishment of problematic or undesirable behavior is a common practice, both at home and at school. In one survey 73% of parents with children between ages of 3 and 17 reported that during a 12 month period they used physical punishment, including spanking or slapping (Gelles, 1979). Other surveys have found that 84-97% of all parents use physical punishment sometime during a child's life (Erlanger, 1974; Stark & McEvoy, 1970). Additionally, many school systems condone corporal punishment as a method to deal with unacceptable behavior.

The misuse of corporal punishment can result in physical harm or unwarranted pain and suffering in a child. National statistics (composite 1976-1982) indicated that physical injury accounted for 25% of all reported child maltreatment cases, with injuries such as skull fracture, internal bleeding, bruises and welts (Russell & Trainor, 1984). While excessive force and physical injury may be one indication of the misuse of corporal punishment, there are other ways it may be misused as well. The intensity of the punishment may not be physically harmful but still inappropriate for the particular transgression that is the occasion for punishment. It may also be inappropriate for certain people (e.g., strangers) to be the agent of punishment. Finally, certain behaviors may not be rule-violations in all situations, and thus not always punishable infractions.

Little is known about how adults or children judge instances of corporal punishment to be appropriate or inappropriate. Such attitudes and judgments are likely to influence the actual incidence and character of such punishment (e.g., intensity, delegation to other agents, etc.) by socialization agents and may also influence how children accept, interpret, or report the punishment meted out to them for different transgressions, in different situations, and by different agents. The purpose of this study was to investigate factors affecting parent's (mother's) and children's judgments of the acceptability and severity of corporal punishment. Of particular interest were the type of transgression and the (adult) agent administering punishment.

The type of transgression is a significant indicator of whether a parent will punish a child. For example, Grusec presented mothers of 7- to 9-year-old children stories that depicted a child's antisocial actions or failures to behave prosocially (Grusec et al., 1982). Mothers were then asked to indicate how they would respond if their child had committed the transgression, and punishment was one of the 6 most commonly indicated responses. Mothers reported further that they would use punishment more for antisocial acts than for a failure to be prosocial. Other studies have indicated that mothers react with punishment when their child acts defiantly

or disobediently (e.g., Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Parke, 1974). Thus, parents do respond to certain transgressions more punitively than others, indicating that transgression type is likely to be a factor governing the acceptability of corporal punishment in a given instance.

Recent studies of judgments about rule violations have shown that children also draw conceptual distinctions between classes of transgressions (e.g., Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1981, 1985; Tisak & Turiel, 1984; Turiel, 1977, 1983; Weston & Turiel, 1980), though it is not known if these conceptualizations relate to judgments about punishment. There are three major rule categories that have been identified: violation of prudential, social convention and moral rules. Prudential rules pertain to the class of behaviors thatpose a threat or danger to an individual (Tisak & Turiel, 1984). Social conventions have been defined as "behavioral uniformities which coordinate the actions of individuals participating in a social system" (Turiel (1977, p. 79). Examples of such conventions would include modes of dress and social greetings. Finally, moral violations include harm to others, violating rights, and acts having negative effects on others' general welfare.

Transgressions may also be classified in terms of the character of the rule that is violated. Generalizability (frequently termed 'rule relativity') refers to the extent that rules governing behavior are affected by the context in which the behavior occurs. Rule contingency refers to whether the behavior is acceptable in the absence of a governing rule (Turiel, 1977, 1983). Social conventions are relative to the social context and, therefore, the content of the regulations can vary from context to context without changing the function the convention serves. For example, a strict dress code at a restaurant (e.g., formal attire) is arbitrary and does not apply to all restaurants. On the other hand, moral and prudential rules are neither relative to the social context nor contingent upon the existence of social regulation. For example, stealing (moral) is a violation of the rights of another, regardless of where it occurred and running in front of a moving car (prudential) is almost always a danger to a child. Prudential and moral acts are similar in that they involve harm to a person (self or other), but different in that moral acts generally contain a social-interactional component.

Overall, research and theory suggest a number of social and cognitive factors that should influence how children and adults, particularly parents, will construe social rules, violations of those rules, and punishments in response to such infractions. Children's level of cognitive development should influence their interpretation of rules and their social roles as children, subject to various types of adult authority, should influence their judgments about the acceptability and other aspects of punishment. Similarly, parents' level of cognitive development, their assumptions, beliefs,

or "implicit theories" about children's capabilities for self-regulation, and their social roles as parents should influence their views of rules governing children's behavior and the use of punishment for infractions of such rules.

The present study focused upon two aspects of a transgression / punishment interchange that provide a common background for judgments about corporal punishment, type of transgression and agent administering corporal punishment (spanking). Preschool (four to five years of age) and preadolescent (ten to eleven years of age) children and their mothers heard brief vignettes describing prudential, social convention and moral transgressions. They first judged whether the violation was dependent upon the presence of an existing rule (rule contingency), and whether the violation was situation specific (rule relativity or generalizability). They then judged whether the child should be punished for the described infraction, if corporal punishment was an acceptable form of punishment, and how severe the corporal punishment should be administered by various agents. The agents of discipline depicted in the present study were described as the target child's mother or familiar adults in the role of babysitter and teacher.

On the basis of prior research on judgments of rule infractions, it was predicted that prudential and moral transgressions would be judged as more serious, less rule relative, and more generalizable than social convention transgressions. It was further predicted that judgments of the appropriateness and severity of corporal punishment would build upon these judgments. Specifically, it was hypothesized that corporal punishment for prudential and moral transgressions would be judged as more acceptable and appropriately more severe than for social convention transgressions. From the general perspective of theory and research on children's moral judgments (cf. Berndt, 1977; Berndt & Berndt, 1975; Walden, 1982), it was hypothesized that children, particularly younger ones, would focus primarily upon single aspects of transgressions and make less articulated judgments about the appropriateness or severity of punishment.

Method

Subjects. There were two groups of children: 23 children 4-5 years of age (M= 4,11), 10 of whom were female, and 23 children 11-12 years of age (M= 12,1), 14 of whom were female. There were two groups of adults, each comprised of the mothers of the children of each age.

Stimulus Materials. Two transgressions of each type (prudential, moral and social convention transgressions) were described in six vignettes. Prudential transgressions were lighting matches and opening a bottle of poison. Moral transgressions were hitting a friend and stealing money. Social convention transgressions were eating lunch with one's fingers and

staying up past bedtime. The age and sex of the target child matched that of the subject (for each mother the age and sex of the target child was the same as her child). Mothers were administered an additional questionnaire to assess their own use of and attitude towards corporal punishment.

The vignettes were one or two declarative sentences describing a transgression. For example, a vignette describing a prudential violation went as follows: "Brent was playing and found some matches. He started striking and lighting the matches." Another vignette, this one describing a moral violation, was: "Brent was playing and saw someone's purse lying on the shelf. Brent opened the purse and took some money out and put it in his pocket." Finally, one of the vignettes describing a social convention violation was: "During lunch time, Brent sat down and started eating his lunch with his fingers."

Procedure. Each child was seen individually for one 15-20 minute interview. Children were first instructed in the use of a 4-point moral judgment scale for rating the seriousness of the target child's transgression, and a 4-point severity scale for indicating how hard the target child's mother should spank. The seriousness scale consisted of four faces with progressively larger frowns, labeled as "OK," "A Little Bit Bad," "Very Bad," and "Very, Very Bad." Subjects were then asked to determine if the child's misbehavior warranted punishment by judging if the transgression deserved "None", "Some", or "A Lot" of punishment. The severity scale consisted of a large zero for "No Spanking," and progressively larger paddles, labeled as "Light Spanking," "Medium Spanking," and "Hard Spanking." The subject was then instructed to think of the target child in the story as being his or her age.

For children, the six vignettes were read aloud in random order. Questionnaires, written descriptions of the vignettes, and directions were sent home with each child for the mother to complete. One questionnaire contained the six stories and relevant questions and was identical to the stories and questions presented verbally to the children. A second questionnaire contained questions regarding the mother's attitude toward and use of corporal punishment. Together, these instruments required 25-20 minutes to complete.

For each vignette, all subjects were asked seven questions. To assess seriousness, children were asked to point to or name the face that indicated "How would you describe (target child's) behavior". Subjects were then asked (rule contingency) "Would it be OK for (target child) to (transgression) if there were no rules about boys'/girls' (transgression)?" and (generalizability) "Would it be OK at someone else's home to have a rule that it was OK to (described behavior)?" To assess the acceptability of

spanking by an adult for the target child's behavior, subjects were asked the following: "If (target child's) mother caught (target child) doing (transgression), would it be OK for her to spank (target child)?"; "If while at the babysitter's house, (target child) was caught doing (transgression), would it be OK for the babysitter to spank (target child)?"; and "If while at school, (target child) got caught by the teacher doing (transgression), would it be OK for the teacher to spank (target child)?"

After all six stories and question sets had been administered, the subject was to suppose that the target child's parents prohibited the spanking of their child by others. The subject was then asked, "Now think back to the stories that you just heard. If (the target child) did these things while at the babysitter's house or at school, should the babysitter or the teacher still spank (target child)?" Subjects were then asked to respond "yes" or "no" with respect to each of the transgressions in the six stories.

The subjects were then asked specifically about the severity of corporal punishment to be administered, "If (target child) is to be spanked by the mother for the following behaviors, how hard should (target child) be spanked?" The four-point severity scale was presented, and each misbehavior was once again read aloud.

Scoring of data. Dichotomous variables requiring a "yes" or "no" response included rule contingency and generalizability and judgments of the acceptability of spanking. "No" responses were assigned a value of 0 and "yes" responses a value of 1. For the other variables numerical values were assigned as a function of intensity or degree, (e.g., "None" = 0, "Some" = 1, and "A Lot" = 2). After scoring, each subject's responses to the 2 vignettes comprising each behavior type were averaged. These means constituted the data for statistical analyses.

There were four factors in this study. Three factors were relevant to all dependent variables: Target Child's Age (young or old), Respondent (child or mother), and Type of Transgression (prudential, moral or social convention). For judgments about acceptability of corporal punishment by a particular agent, there was also a fourth factor, Discipline Agent (target child's mother, babysitter, or teacher).[1]

Results

Judgments of Rule Infraction

Rule contingency. Prudential and moral transgressions were judged to be less rule contingent (M's=.152 and .065, respectively) than social convention transgressions (M=.903), and moral transgressions were judged to be less rule contingent than prudential transgressions, $F(2,43)=366.33$, $p<.001$. The values of the observed means suggest that prudential and

moral transgressions were judged to be wrong, even in the absence of a rule. Social convention transgressions were judged to be wrong only if they violated an existing rule.

Rule Generalizability. Social convention transgressions were judged to be more acceptable in other settings (rule relative or low generalizability) than prudential and moral transgressions, $F(1,43)=349.21$, $p<.001$ (M's=.881, .103 and .071, respectively). Children judged the target child's transgressions overall to be more rule relative or generalizable than did mothers, $F(1,44)=12.64$, $p<.001$ (M's=.405 and .297, respectively).

Seriousness of transgression. Social convention transgressions were judged to be less serious than prudential and moral transgressions, $F(2,43)=64.06$, $p<.001$ (M's=1.24, 2.16 and 2.17, respectively). Children generally judged the target child's misbehavior to be a more serious transgression than did their mothers, $F(1,44)=26.60$, $p<.001$ (M's=2.10 and 1.65, respectively), but a significant two way interaction, $F(2,43)=7.02$, $p<.01$, indicated this was true only for moral and social convention transgressions. These results are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Degree to which transgressions warranted punishment. This variable reflects how strongly children and mothers felt a given type of transgression warranted some degree of punishment. For this variable, all main effects and interactions were significant except the interaction between Respondent and Target Child's Age. Means are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Younger children's judgments did not differ across the three types of transgressions, but their mothers, older children, and mothers of older children judged social convention transgressions to deserve punishment less than prudential and moral transgressions. Higher order interactions qualified all other effects.

Judgments of punishment

Severity of corporal punishment. For this variable all main effects and interactions were significant. The relevant means and F values are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Social convention transgressions were judged by older children and all

mothers to deserve less severe spanking than prudential and moral transgressions, and moral transgressions were judged to deserve a less severe spanking than prudential ones. Basically, younger children's judgments did not differ by type of transgression. Similar to their judgments about the degree of deserved non-specific punishment, younger children and their mothers judged prudential transgressions to deserve more severe spanking than did older children and their mothers, (M's=2.30 and 1.81, respectively). Children of both ages felt the target child should receive a more severe spanking for prudential and moral transgressions (M's=2.25 and 2.19, respectively) than did their mothers (M's=1.87 and 1.45). All other interactions were attributable to the tendency for younger children to judge social convention transgressions as meriting more severe spankings than did their mothers, older children, and mothers of older children.

Stated most simply, unlike older children and all mothers, younger children once again did not distinguish between types of transgressions and proposed more severe corporal punishment, no matter what the infraction. In addition, younger children as well as their mothers proposed more severe corporal punishment for prudential transgressions than did older children and their mothers. Finally, children of both ages viewed prudential and moral transgressions to deserve more severe corporal punishment than did their mothers, suggesting that social convention but not prudential violations are viewed differently by the end of middle childhood. These findings suggest that the developmental course for judgments of the type of transgression proceeds from undifferentiated harshness to a discriminated weighing of punishments to fit various types of transgressions, one that comes to involve reduced harshness in the consequences for various types of rule-defined misbehavior. Children also propose harsher punishments overall, and the generality of this harshness narrows as they come to distinguish different types of transgressions.

Acceptability of punishment by various agents. For this variable, there were many significant effects which are listed in Table 4. For all agents, children of both ages viewed spankings as more acceptable than did their mothers (M's=.69 and .38, respectively). Furthermore, younger children viewed punishment of social convention transgressions as more acceptable than did older children or mothers of children of either age. Corporal punishment for prudential and moral transgressions was judged to be more acceptable regardless of agent than for social convention transgressions (M's= .65, .65, and .33, respectively) by older children and all mothers, while younger children felt that spankings were acceptable by any agent for all types of transgressions. These results are presented in Table 5.

Insert Tables 4 and 5 About Here

Older children showed a consensus[2] about the acceptability of spankings by agents for moral (acceptable) and social convention (unacceptable) transgressions, but they were equivocal about spanking for prudential transgressions. Regardless of the age of their child, mothers felt that other agents should not spank for social convention violations but were equivocal about the acceptability of spanking by other agents for prudential andmoral transgressions.

Interestingly, perhaps reflecting their actual experiences in school, there was a consensus among older children that teacher spankings were acceptable, but they were equivocal about spankings by mothers or a babysitter. All mothers showed a consensus that spankings by a babysitter were unacceptable, but they were more endorsing (though somewhat equivocal) about the acceptability of spankings by a child's mother. For judgments about the acceptability of spanking by a teacher, mothers of younger children viewed the spankings as unacceptable whereas mothers of older children were equivocal. Means are reported in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 About Here

To summarize, younger children viewed spankings by all agents for all behaviors as more acceptable than did their mothers, older children and mothers of older children. Older children felt spankings by teachers were more acceptable than by babysitters or even by a child's own mother. Not surprisingly, perhaps, mothers of younger children judged spankings by the mother as more acceptable than by any other agent, whereas mothers of older children felt a mother's spanking was more acceptable than any other agent only for prudential transgressions and did not distinguish among agents for the other misbehaviors. Finally, younger children and their mothers judged spankings by the mother for prudential violations as more acceptable than did older children and their mothers (M's= .74 and .53, respectively). These findings suggest that mothers feel a sense of proprietariness regarding the administration of corporal punishment, but as their children grow older the mothers become more willing to delegate this responsibility to appropriate authorities (agents).

Acceptability of prohibited spankings by babysitter or teacher. When the target child's babysitter or teacher administered a spanking despite the parents' wishes, children's and mothers' judgments of the acceptability of

the spanking were similar for both agents. Listing the significant effects first for babysitter and then for teacher, there were main effects for type of transgression, $F(2,43)=24.19$ and 24.62, $p>.01$, for target child's age, $F(1,44)=7.11$ and 4.45, $p>.05$, and for respondent, $F(1,44)=15.67$ and 16.06, $p>.001$. For the teacher as agent there were also significant interactions between type of transgression and target child's age, $F(1,43)=6.32$, $p>.01$, type of transgression and respondent, $F(1,44)=9.60$, $p>.001$. For both agenst there was a significant a 3-way interaction between type of transgression, target child's age, and respondent, $F(2,88)=3.62$ and 6.38, $p>.05$. The relevant means are presented in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 About Here

Younger children were equivocal in their acceptance of prohibited spankings for all transgressions. There was consensus among mothers of older children that prohibited spankings for any transgression were completely unacceptable. Older children themselves felt that prohibited spankings were unacceptable for social convention transgressions, but they were equivocal about their acceptability for prudential and moral violations. Mothers of younger children felt clearly that spankings were unacceptable for moral and social convention transgressions, but they, too, were equivocal for prudential transgressions. Thus, older children and mothers of younger children judged a spanking to be more acceptable for prudential and moral transgressions than social convention transgressions. Finally, consistent with their other judgments about (nonprohibited) spanking in general, younger children judged prohibited spankings as more acceptable for social convention transgressions than did their mothers, older children, or mothers of older children. While the actual means for younger children's judgments regarding prohibited spankings suggested they were equivocal or perhaps undecided, they nevertheless felt that prohibited spankings were significantly less acceptable than nonprohibited ones. This may reflect an apparent recognition that an agent's authority to spank, even though broad, can be affected by the presence of a rule prohibiting the action.

Discussion

Even the youngest children discriminated among different types of transgressions on the basis of rule relativity and generalizability, but this pattern of discrimination was not always reflected in judgments about punishment for such transgressions. Prudential and moral transgressions were judged by all subjects to be less rule relative (not contingent upon the presence of a rule), more generalizable to other situations, and as more

serious transgressions than were violations of social convention. Consistent with findings from previous research (e.g., Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1981, 1985; Weston & Turiel, 1980), both children and adults based their judgments of a transgression's seriousness on the type of misbehavior, and violations of prudential and moral rules were judged as more serious than social convention transgressions. However, unlike older children and adults, preschool children's judgments of the acceptability and severity of corporal punishment failed to reflect differences in types of transgressions. The overall pattern of results suggests differences in the criteria employed by children and mothers in their judgments about the acceptability and severity of corporal punishment.

Factors affecting children's judgments. Although preschool and fifth grade children were equally capable of distinguishing between types of transgressions for judgments of rule contingency, generalizability and seriousness, they differed in the extent to which two factors, type of transgression and discipline agent, affected their judgments about the acceptability and severity of corporal punishment. Preschool children viewed spankings as acceptable and felt they should be severe for any of the transgressions and by any of the discipline agents. Fifth graders viewed spankings as acceptable and appropriately severe only for prudential and moral violations and as more acceptable when administered by a teacher than by a mother or babysitter. Thus, when evaluating the acceptability and severity of corporal punishment, preschool children appear to have focused solely on the presence of a rule violation as a judgment criterion, disregarding the type of transgression or agent of punishment, whereas older children's judgments reflected consideration of these parameters.

This pattern of judgment and non-discrimination may be a consequence of preschool children's socialization experiences which, compared to older children, probably include more frequent punishment, for all types of transgressions, and by a variety of agents. As children mature, parents rely less on physical punishment to address misbehavior (Clifford, 1959; Patterson, 1982) and more on alternative strategies, especially verbal reasoning (Roberts, Block & Block, 1981), possibly because as children's reasoning abilities develop, they are more likely to respond to non-punitive types of discipline (LaVoie, 1974). One reason that preschool children might be punished more frequently is the necessity for parents to control undesirable behavior in young children whose skills and standards for self-regulation are poorly developed (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Young children may also view many forms of punishment (verbal, non-corporal, and corporal) as severe because to them punishment, in general, may provoke heightened levels of anxiety and fear. Thus, young children's focus on rule violations

and their broad acceptance of corporal punishment for all misbehaviors reflects an implicit inference that the actual occurrence of frequent and harsh (in their subjective experience) punishment means that is acceptable and appropriate.

Children's judgments of the acceptability of corporal punishment administered by different discipline agents may also reflect how authority is conceptualized by children of different developmental levels. To the extent that young children base concepts of authority on respect for the adult's wisdom and superiority in size and power, through a combination of fear, admiration and affection (Damon, 1977; Piaget, 1932), young children may be accepting of corporal punishment from any agent because of the unilateral respect for authority granted to adults. Older children's equivocal judgments of the acceptability of corporal punishment by mothers and babysitters would then reflect their appraisal of adults as fallible, less fear evoking (Piaget, 1932), and having some limitations in the scope of their legitimate authority. For these children the acceptability of spankings by teachers would thus reflect an acknowledgement, gleaned through vicarious or direct experience, of the legitimate power of teachers to administer corporal punishment in the school setting.

The present results suggest that preschool children can alter their views and become less accepting of the legitimacy of other adults to administer corporal punishment if there is an explicit parental rule prohibiting spankings by others. Young children did judge spankings by babysitters and teachers as significantly less acceptable when there was an explicit rule prohibiting spankings, compared to when there was no mention of a rule. Thus, preschool children may benefit from having explicit knowledge of who is allowed to administer corporal punishment to them. However, punishment by agents with legitimate authority may still be abusive in its severity, and young children would also need to learn that some levels of punishment are unacceptable and then how to discriminate abusive from non-abusive spankings. Future research might address how well young children would learn to identify abuse using various outcome criteria such as bruising or other signs of physical damage.

Young children's moral judgments of an action are often strongly affected by the outcome of the action (e.g., Piaget, 1932; Walden, 1982) and they might be able to identify abusive corporal punishment as an adult transgression using specifiable and observable criteria such as harm to themselves or others. Given a judgment based on objective outcome criteria, children might then feel compelled to report misbehavior if they viewed the transgression as threatening the well-being of the victim (Tisak, 1986). Thus, it seems reasonable to propose that young children could learn to

conceptualize abuse incidents as transgressions worthy of reporting to other authorities.

Factors affecting Mother's judgments. Mother's judgments of the acceptability and severity of corporal punishment varied by the type of misbehavior, the agent administering the punishment, and, to a lesser extent, the age of the child. The significance of the type of transgression for mothers' judgments probably reflect the role that discipline plays in parental socialization practices (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Minton, Kagan & Levine, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Sawin, Parke, Harrison, & Kreling, 1975). A number of studies have demonstrated a relation between types of misbehavior and consequent parental discipline (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Grusec, Dix & Mills, 1982; Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Parke, 1974). For example, Grusec (Grusec et al., 1982) asked mothers of 7- to 9-year old children to describe how they would react to certain misdeeds committed by their child. Mothers reported they would respond more frequently and be more punitive if they were the victim of the child's transgression and if the transgression was a serious antisocial act rather than a failure to be prosocial.

Grusec has argued that a mother's punitive response to antisocial acts mirrors the attitudes of society to protect members from the undesirable actions of others. Antisocial behavior "must be swiftly and uniformly suppressed" (Grusec et al., 1982, p. 287) so that others will not be harmed. Turiel (Tisak & Turiel, 1984; Turiel, 1977, 1983) described prudential transgressions as personally threatening to the individual, moral transgressions as threatening the welfare of others, and social convention transgressions as threatening to social regularities (the conventional uniformities of behavior). In the current study, mothers' decisions to be more punitive towards prudential and moral transgressions than towards social convention transgressions may thus reflect both their obligation to protect society from their children's antisocial acts (Grusec et al., 1982) and their need to protect their children from their own dangerous behavior. The latter is also compatible with a sociobiological perspective linking parenting behavior with survival of offspring (Wilson, 1975). Young children are viewed as more vulnerable to behaviors that may be self-injurious and, therefore, mothers of young children tend to have more extreme responses to such behaviors than mothers of older children.

Another factor that affected mothers' judgments of the acceptability of corporal punishment was the discipline agent. Although 85% of mothers reported that, with their permission, they would allow someone else to spank their children, they clearly feel proprietary about the administration of corporal punishment to their own children, either directly or through explicit delegation. Mothers' general disapproval of corporal punishment

administered by babysitters and teachers may have been affected by the lack of information in the vignettes pertaining to permission for others to spank and reflect their assumption that others do not have the implicit authority to spank their children unless this authority has been expressly delegated. Mothers also may not trust other adults to be judicious in the administration of corporal punishment, especially given current concerns about child abuse. Mothers of younger children were much less likely than mothers of older children to permit others to spank their child, suggesting also that mothers may be sensitive to young children's vulnerability to abuse, including perhaps their inability to recognize and/or report it.

A general picture emerges that mothers are highly discriminating in what might be termed their 'implicit theory of discipline" (Dix, Ruble & Zambarano, 1989). The type of transgression, age of child, and identity of the discipline agent interact in ways possibly further mediated by characteristics of the rules involved, to yield judgments of deservedness, acceptability, and severity of punishment. In a study dealing with mothers' reports of how they would respond to basically moral transgressions, Dix et al. (1989) found that mothers were more inclined to adopt power-assertive techniques of parenting (though their options did not include corporal punishment) when a misbehavior was committed knowingly, and this was also presumably reflected in an inclination towards more severe punishment when an infraction was committed by an older child. Although it is difficult to compare this study directly with the present one since the punishment alternatives Dix ét al. (1989) gave to mothers included verbal reprimands, privilege deprivations, or work assignments but not corporal punishment, the results do not seem inconsistent. In the present study mothers of older children felt that moral transgressions warranted punishment more than did mothers of younger children (see Table 2) and they also tended to prescribe more severe corporal punishment (see Table 3). While these age effects are not large, they are perhaps muted because corporal punishment itself becomes less appropriate as children mature and is replaced by verbal punishment and induction (Clifford, 1959; Patterson, 1982; Roberts et al., 1981). In addition, the tendency for greater deservedness and harsher punishment to be meted to younger children was primarily for prudential transgressions, which can be threatening to the young child's well-being, and to social conventions which might be construed by parents as not yet learned rather than as willful violations. With respect to prudential violations, mothers may also view them as so threatening as to require immediate control so they seek avenues to instantaneous, thoughtless (i.e., automatic) control whereas for older children they have shifted their socialization goals and seek more thoughtful, conscience-directed self-

regulation.

General issues. The status of child-punishment as a social, role-related obligation certainly merits further clarification for societal as well as scientific reasons. Research addressing whether non-parent adults conceptualize the use of corporal punishment similarly to parents would help determine if certain goals and obligations (e.g., the responsibility for a child's safety) are part of the parental role or whether they are part of the adult role in general. Non-parent adults may not experience or feel the need to assume the same kind of responsibility with regard to socialization, protection, and guiding authority as do parents, so their judgments of the acceptability of corporal punishment might reflect a different set of values and standards. For example, not having the actual experience of controlling a child's behavior over long periods of time,and thus recognizing the need for immediate and effective control of impulsive or dangerous behavior, non-parent adults' judgments might reflect more idealistic values about refraining from the use of corporal punishment in general. On the other hand, they might exaggerate such factors as authority and obedience in ways that could enhance the likelihood of committing or failing to recognize inappropriate, ineffective, excessive, and perhaps even abusive punishment. Examining the judgments and actions of nonparents would also add to our understanding about how adults develop parental role responsibilities, including the judgments and actions they must undertake with respect to children as they implement their role in the socialization process.

The broad acceptance by preschool children of the use and severity of corporal punishment has implications for the effective detection and reporting of abuse, at least in terms of children's own abilities to do so. Young children may not evaluate spankings resulting in harm as inappropriate and outside the legitimate authority of parents or other adults. The central factor would seem to be their uncritical willingness to ascribe legitimate authority to parents, as well as other adults to administer severe spankings for any transgression. Therefore, helping children to identify and report abusive corporal punishment may hinge on refining their evaluations of the legitimacy of parental and adult authority to administer severe spankings or other types of corporal punishment.

The present findings suggest the need for research on children's cability to learn to discriminate abusive treatment from non-abusive, societally acceptable punishment. Fortunately, some of the findings indicate at least limited ways that children, especially young ones, might be able to master such distinctions, for example, through the social (as well as parental) propagation of clearly defined rules about who has the authority to be an agent of punishment and explicit delineation of observable signs that

punishment was overly severe. And although the present study focused on judgments about physical punishment, the results have potential generalizability to children's ability to recognize, resist, and report other mistreatment they may encounter, such as sexual abuse or other types of maltreatment that are not physical in character.

Put most generally, an initial avenue to heighten children's recognition of inappropriate treatment would be to provide guidelines, rules or easily distinguishable cues that transform such awareness away from a process of complex, inferential judgment and into one of more straightforward recognition that a rule has been violated or that harm, not punishment, has been committed. With the capacity for such awareness they can participate in society's marshalling of who may do what to whom, especially as that applies to relations between adults and children.

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Footnotes

1. The data for the 2 x 2 x 3 design were analyzed using a multivariate approach to the analysis of repeated measures (McCall & Appelbaum, 1973). The data for the 2 x 2 x 3 x 3 design were analyzed using a MANOVA procedure and all variables pertaining to acceptability were considered simultaneously. Follow up comparisons include simple effect F-tests were calculated and followed by either t-tests or Newman-Keuls planned comparisons. Within subject factor differences were examined using correlated t-tests and between subject factor differences were examined using the Newman-Keuls method of multiple comparisons. Due to the large number of follow up comparisons, these statistics will not be individually reported. When a group difference is reported in the text, it is based on a follow up statistic indicating a chance probability equal to or less than .05.

2. For subject's judgments about the acceptability of spanking, z scores were calculated to determine whether group means differed from 0, 1, or chance (.05). Group mean responses were examined first to determine if the observed values differed from chance response (0.5) and, if so, to determine the direction of the deviation ("no" or "yes"). When means did not differ from chance ($p > .05$) judgments are described in the text as equivocal or lacking consensus. When differences were significantly less than or greater than a chance probability of 0.5, judgments were described as demonstrating consensus in the direction of the observed mean. If judgments showed an emerging consensus by deviation from chance, the means were examined to determine if they differed from the theoretical value of 0 ("no") or 1 ("yes"), which would represent a clear consensus for a given judgment. When these tests revealed that there was no significant difference between an observed mean and the theoretical mean for perfect consensus, judgments are described in the text or denoted in tables as representing a clear consensus for acceptability or unacceptability.

TABLE 1

Children's and Mother's Judgments Regarding the Seriousness of Different Types of Transgressions

	Type of Transgression		
	Prudential	Moral	Social Convention
Younger children	2.43	2.30	1.76
Older children	2.11	2.30	1.46
Mothers of younger children	2.17	2.02	0.74
Mothers of older children	1.93	2.04	1.02

Note. Seriousness of transgression was measured using a 4-point scale where "OK" = 0, "A Little Bit Bad" = 1, "Very Bad" = 2, and "Very, Very Bad" = 3.

TABLE 2

Children's and Mother's Judgments Regarding the Degree to which Transgressions Warranted Punishment

	Type of Transgression		
	Prudential	Moral	Social Convention
Younger children	1.76	1.59	1.49
Older children	1.33	1.37	0.54
Mothers of younger children	1.30	1.17	0.28
Mothers of older children	1.17	1.35	0.39

Note. Amount of deserved punishment was measured using a 3-point scale where "None" = 0, "Some" = 1, and "A Lot" = 2.

TABLE 3

Children's and Mother's Judgments Concerning Severity of Spanking Merited by Different Types of Transgressions

	Type of Transgression		
	Prudential	Moral	Social Convention
Younger children	2.50	2.39	2.35
Older children	2.00	2.00	0.59
Mothers of younger children	2.11	1.37	0.17
Mothers of older children	1.63	1.54	0.28

Note. Severity of spanking was measured using a 4-point scale where "None" = 0, "Light" = 1, "Medium" = 2, and "Hard" = 3.

TABLE 4

Summary of Effects for Factors Influencing Judgments of the Acceptability of Corporal Punishment Administered by Various Agents

Main Effect and Interaction Terms (df)	
Type of Transgression (2, 43)	69.94***
Respondent (1, 44)	32.40***
Target Child's Age (1, 44)	4.61*
Discipline Agent (2, 43)	24.72***
Target Child's Age x Respondent (1, 44)	6.98**
Target Child's Age x Type of Transgression (2, 43)	5.37**
Target Child's Age x Discipline Agent (4, 41)	6.29**
Respondent x Type of Transgression (2, 43)	8.03***
Respondent x Discipline Agent (2, 43)	14.66***
Type of Transgression x Discipline Agent (4, 41)	2.48
Target Child's Age x Type of Transgression x Respondent (2, 43)	7.3**
Target Child's Age x Respondent x Discipline Agent (2, 43)	6.56**
Target Child's Age x Type of Transgression x Discipline Agent (4, 41)	2.96*
Respondent x Type of Transgression x Discipline Agent (4, 41)	1.81(ns)
Target Child's Age x Respondent x Type of Transgression x Discipline Agent (4, 41)	1.86(ns)

*p<.05

**p<.01

***p<.001

TABLE 5

Children's and Mother's Judgments about the Acceptability of Spanking for Types of Transgressions

	Type of Transgression		
	Prudential	Moral	Social Convention
Younger children	.83[a]	.83[a]	.80[a]
Older children	.64[a]	.73[a]	.29[b]
Mothers of younger children	.59	.52	.11[b]
Mothers of older children	.56	.51	.14[b]

Note. Acceptability reflects a 2-point scale, where "No" = 0 and "Yes" = 1.

[a]Concensus for Acceptability (See Footnote 2 for definition of censensus)

[b]Concensus for Unacceptability (See Footnote 2 for definition of consensus)

TABLE 6

Children's and Mother's Judgments about the Acceptability of Spanking by Discipline Agent

	Discipline Agent		
	Mother	Sitter	Teacher
Younger children	.85[a]	.81[a]	.80[a]
Older children	.64	.42	.70[a]
Mothers of younger children	.63	.31[b]	.28[b]
Mothers of older children	.51	.34	.35

Note. Acceptability reflects a 2-point scale, where "No" = 0 and "Yes" = 1.

[a]Concensus for Acceptability (See Footnote 2 for definition of consensus)

[b]Concensus for Unacceptability (See Footnote 2 for definition of consensus)

TABLE 7

Mean Responses to Questions Concerning the Acceptability of Spanking by an Agent When Prohibited by the Target Child's Parents

	Sitter			Teacher		
	Prudential	Moral	Social Convention	Prudential	Moral	Social Convention
Younger children	.59	.65	.46	.54	.61	.52
Older children	.39	.48	.06[b]	.28[b]	.63	.11[c]
Mothers of younger children	.37	.24[b]	.00[c]	.37	.22[b]	.00[c]
Mothers of older children	.22[b]	.22[b]	.04[c]	.22[b]	.20[b]	.04[c]

Note: Acceptability reflects a 2-point scale, where "No" = 0 and "Yes" = 1.

[a]Concensus of Acceptability

[b]Concensus of Unacceptability

[c]Invariably Unacceptable